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## **Flexible Characterization: Herstorical Performance in Heritage Sites**

This article explores how performance and character can be used to represent the lives of real women in spaces of heritage. It focuses on two different site-specific performances created by the author in the South Ayrshire region of Scotland: *CauseWay: The Story of the Alloway Suffragettes* and *In Hidden Spaces: The Untold Stories of the Women of Rozelle House*. These were created with a practice-as-research methodology and aim to offer new models for the use of character in site-specific performance practice. The article explores the variety of methods and techniques used including verbatim writing, spatial exploration and Herstorical research in order to demonstrate the ways in which women's narratives were represented in a theoretically informed, site-specific manner. Drawing on Phil Smith's mythogeography and responding to Laurajane Smith's work on gender and heritage, the conflicting tensions of identity, performance and authenticity are drawn together to offer flexible characterization as a new model for the creation of feminist heritage performance. Victoria Bianchi is a theatre maker and academic in the School of Education at the University of Glasgow. Her work explores the relationship between space, feminism and identity. She has written and performed work for the National Trust for Scotland, Camden People's Theatre and Assembly at Edinburgh, among other institutions.

Keywords: practice-as-research, site-specific, feminism, flexible characterization, colonial past

Within contemporary site-specific performance, various practitioners have experimented with the interplay between the identity of performers and that of the character they portrays.<sup>i</sup> While Wrights & Sites and Rosana Cade may perform a version of themselves as they walk, performers for companies such as Punchdrunk and Grid Iron often remain rigidly in character throughout. Indeed, conceptualizations of the interplay between character and 'self' in British theatre have shifted significantly over the past few decades.<sup>ii</sup> The necessity to use character in a more traditional sense is perhaps more apt when representing the stories of real people. This being said, if the aim of a performance is connection between audience and performer, the conventional use of character may create social and temporal barriers. During my doctoral research at the University of the West of Scotland, I worked as writer-in-residence for the South Ayrshire Arts Partnership exploring the

tensions between self and character and developing a specifically feminist approach to creating site-specific performance in spaces of heritage.<sup>iii</sup>

My residency took place in a coastal region in the West of Scotland from 2015-2018, and resulted in the creation of new site-specific performance works, two of which are the focus of this article. The first, *CauseWay: The Story of the Alloway Suffragettes* (2015), told the story of Frances Parker and Ethel Moorhead, two suffragettes who attempted to blow up the cottage of the poet Robert Burns in the village of Alloway in 1914. The second work, *In Hidden Spaces: The Untold Stories of the Women of Rozelle House* (2016), presented a fragmented, interactive account of the different lives of the women who had lived and worked in Rozelle House, Ayr (Figure 1). Both works were developed and performed within the sites where the stories had taken place.<sup>iv</sup> This article is an exploration of the techniques used in these projects in order to represent the lives of real women whose stories have typically been excluded from dominant heritage discourse by prioritising identity, spatial narratives and audience-performer connection.

The decision to use these specific sites to explore feminist heritage performance was borne of several varying factors and influences, both logistical and theoretical. Burns' Cottage, for example, is the birthplace of Scotland's national poet, and a popular tourist site in the West of Scotland. On a typical weekend in high season, crowds of people descend on Alloway in search of an authentic experience of Scottish history. Many already know the name of Robert Burns, along with selections of his works and life story. Far fewer, though, know the story of Frances Parker and Ethel Moorhead. It is fair to assume that the majority of those wandering around Alloway's bucolic streets have no knowledge of an event that 'roused in the locality the most intense indignation'.<sup>v</sup>

In the case of Rozelle House, the country-house-turned-museum offers little insight into the women who lived there. This former country residence of slaver Robert Hamilton was selected for this project due to Laurajane Smith's assertion that country houses are 'indisputably elite-masculine in the symbolic power and prestige they represent'.<sup>vi</sup> Although South Ayrshire council has turned

the house into an art gallery, its patriarchal, colonial past is still evident in the grandeur of the house and a mural of the slaves owned by Hamilton. Both in Alloway and Rozelle House, I experimented with varying levels of performing character(s) in order to explore how best to represent the stories of these women in a site-responsive manner. Scholars such as Phil Smith caution against ‘smuggling extraneous character narrative’ into site-based performance, but, in my work, I found that this should not necessarily be the case when the focus is to represent marginalised narratives.<sup>vii</sup> As the specific narratives question concerned women, I employ the term Herstory to describe them. The term was originally used by Robyn Morgan,<sup>viii</sup> and was subsequently defined by Casey Miller and Kate Swift:

When women in the movement use herstory, their purpose is to emphasise that women’s lives, deeds, and participation in human affairs have been neglected or undervalued in standard histories.<sup>ix</sup>

‘Herstory’, then, refers to the historical narratives of women found within the performance sites. Throughout the process, I found that representing ‘Herstorical’ characters in site-based work requires a specific set of considerations due to lack of spatial/theatrical barriers between performer and audience, and a dearth of documentation surrounding women’s lives.

The creative process of each of these works involved using Herstorical, theoretical and creative practice in order to develop an approach to using character that would allow for a connection between the performer, the present-day site and the women represented. Heritage performance exists beyond traditional performance spaces, and in a site that often claims to represent accurately the facts of historical existence. This begs the question of what an audience is willing to accept in terms of pretence or artistic license. Does heritage performance need to offer an ‘accurate’ representation of history in order to be deemed a success?<sup>x</sup> Furthermore, how can accuracy be balanced against the suggestion that site-based performance should eschew character and therefore have actors perform only as themselves rather than Herstorical figures?<sup>xi</sup> In order to

explore these ideas, I drew from Laurajane Smith's work on heritage and gender, in addition to the Performance, Learning and Heritage project carried out at Manchester University from 2005-2008.<sup>xii</sup>

I also engaged with Phil Smith's work on mythogeography, which is an approach to exploring space that prioritizes walking practice, myth-making and unrepresented narratives.<sup>xiii</sup> My position within both of these projects was that of lead-researcher and co-creator, which allowed me to develop a site-responsive method rooted in theoretical understandings of heritage, space and gender. My aim, for this article, is to elucidate the theoretical frameworks of *CauseWay* and *In Hidden Spaces* and to indicate how the tension between fact and fiction and perceptions of historical accuracy impacted upon the development of character within the performances. This leads to a conclusion involving the idea of 'flexible characterization' as a unique, theoretically-informed model for creating feminist performance in heritage sites.

## **Methodology**

Both of these performances were developed using practice-as-research (PaR) as the primary methodological framework, supplemented by a range of qualitative methodological tools, including focus groups and surveys, as is common for PaR researchers.<sup>xiv</sup> The importance of PaR as a methodology stems from the rejection of logocentrism as a prerequisite of knowledge exchange: as Estelle Barrett argues, 'artistic research demonstrates that knowledge is derived from doing and from the senses'.<sup>xv</sup> This phenomenological perspective underpins the development of the works created in this study; the purpose of my PaR methodology was to help those attending the work to understand the site and the women represented through a combination of sensory encounters that placed the written elements of the performance into a relationship with other textual stimuli. When

experiencing the research works in the space, information is received and processed holistically by the mind and body. Indeed, live performance work is comprised of a ‘multiplicity of factors’ that can only be understood through experience.<sup>xvi</sup> In this manner, it was my intention that audience members would experience a fuller understanding of the Herstorical characters and narratives we were representing by hearing their words and standing where they once stood.

Smith’s mythogeography was one of the key methodological tools in this study, employed in order to develop a model of PaR that would allow myth and storytelling to take precedence in the development of these works. This decision was made due to the lack of Herstorical documentation, and the resultant reliance on folklore, oral accounts and creative practice. One example of mythogeographical practice is exploring unguarded yet technically closed spaces.<sup>xvii</sup> I used this approach throughout the process of creating *In Hidden Spaces* as it allowed those involved in the project to explore aspects of Rozelle House that were not public-facing or tourist friendly, and to access parts of the house that the women living there would have inhabited.

Another mythogeographical tool of use was collective walking as a method for disrupting notions of space and place. In *CauseWay*, the movement of the performers and audience across the site became a protest against the hegemonic, androcentric narratives within it, just as Parker and Moorhead had protested a century before. Such explorations allowed us to explore the space through a mythogeographic, feminist lens by which unrepresented Herstories could be sought out or imagined.

I also drew from the fields of performance studies, human geography and heritage studies throughout my work in the sites. For example, I began the project *In Hidden Spaces* by handing the performers FN Pearson’s list of questions to ask when exploring a space, such as ‘Who am I and what am I doing?’ and ‘Is what I might see or do either prescribed or proscribed?’<sup>xviii</sup> These questions encouraged the performers to interrogate their immediate impressions of Rozelle House, and to relate their experiences as performers to their physical and perceptual understandings of the space we were working in.

In order to imbue the creative processes with the notion of Soja's socio-spatial dialectic, those working on *CauseWay* and *In Hidden Spaces* (myself included) continually discussed how we understood the space(s) and the women we were researching, how this was changing and what had led to these changes.<sup>xix</sup> Furthermore, relationships to, and conceptualizations of, the performance sites were discussed at length with audience members and performers in the post-performance focus groups and questionnaires for each work. By foregrounding stories of women in the space, we brought into question the problematic, gender-based issues inherent in heritage spaces. This framework allowed the performers to develop a relationship with the site that was intrinsically linked to the development of character and their own performance personas.

In order to gain a range of perspectives, I made use of interviews, questionnaires and focus groups. The responses collected were combined with my own reflections on the work in order to identify the key themes in the creation and reception of the performances. In compiling this analysis, I used a form of theoretical bricolage, employing a 'critical, multi-perspectival, multi-theoretical and multi-methodological' lens to explore the themes identified.<sup>xx</sup> The first set of focus groups carried out after *CauseWay*, while helpful, resulted in a low response rate. While several audience members noted their interest in attending, some were unable to attend the specific times of the focus groups and others cancelled on the day. As a result, I decided to use questionnaires in order to cover a wider range of participants who, for a variety of reasons, did not participate in the focus groups. The table below illustrates the response rate for each method:

<b>CauseWay</b>	<b>In Hidden Spaces</b>
Total audience: 65	Total audience: 57
Focus Group: 17	Focus Group: 4 (performers)
Questionnaire: 12	Questionnaire: 40

The transcripts from the focus groups and the questionnaire data were the first sections of data to be analyzed. I used semantic analysis to identify the recurring themes in the transcripts, an approach that involves coding data based on the explicit meanings of the words spoken rather than searching for latent meanings in the text.<sup>xxi</sup> This approach is particularly useful in audience analysis, as it allows participants to report their own experiences and places words rather than individuals at the centre of the enquiry. These themes were then applied to the performances themselves, in addition to reflective journals I had kept throughout the process and the perspectives of the creative teams in order to explore how questions of character, identity and accuracy affected perceptions of the performance works. In the to follow I explore the process of employing a PaR methodology in the development of performance work, while also reflecting on the theoretical implications of the performances themselves in relation to creating flexible Herstorical characters in site-specific practice.

### **CauseWay: The Story of the Alloway Suffragette**

The performances of *CauseWay: The Story of the Alloway Suffragette*, were presented at the Robert Burns Birthplace Museum (RBBM) in Alloway on 10, 11 and 12 October 2015 after being developed and rehearsed on-site (Figure 2). The characters varied throughout the performance, with the performers Pamela Reid and Annaliese Broughton playing themselves, anti-suffrage speakers and Frances Parker and Ethel Moorhead, respectively.<sup>xxii</sup> Throughout this process, I sought a method of creating characters that responded to the site, represented real Herstorical figures, and allowed space for the identity of the performers, all of which I found to be key in creating feminist heritage performance.

The performance began with Broughton and Reid playing themselves before introducing and then becoming their characters. In later scenes, this socio-temporal shift occurred again with the performers reverting to their own identities. In this way, the performance responded to the temporal identity of the site with its a recreation of the past situated within the present. This project marked the beginning of the development of the flexible characterisation model, which progressed further during my work on *In Hidden Spaces*.

The Learning Manager at the RBBM recounted the story of Parker and Moorhead's attempted attack in 1914 to me. In early conversations about the project I was given a brief overview of the facts; the women involved, the cycle to Alloway, the foiled attack and the imprisonment of Parker. While these fragments of information provided a valuable skeleton for the play, in order to develop the characters I felt it prudent to find more historical sources on the events. The necessity for strict adherence to fact in heritage performance has been debated. FN Tivers, for example, suggests that the strength of such work comes not from specific facts or dates but from an interpretive representation of history that can reveal greater truths about the lives of marginalised people.<sup>xxiii</sup> However, at the beginning of the performance process, with a blank computer screen and little information about the lives of Parker and Moorhead, it was necessary to gain a more profound understanding of these women.

This was a mobile performance, and the route of the performance work was developed through a site-responsive devising practice, whereas the fictionalized characters of Parker and Moorhead were formed from media accounts of the event and the political climate of 1910s Ayrshire, in addition to online archives concerning the women themselves. The employment of such documents, however, must come with the acknowledgement that they are an edited and biased account of events. Jenny Kidd notes that critiques of heritage performance have generally focused upon its perceived lack of authenticity – an evaluation that in itself has been criticized due to the fact that museums and heritage sites are, restored interpretations of history.<sup>xxiv</sup> The editing process of historical documentation engenders the sense that it is impossible to give an 'authentic' account



of the past, rendering the process of accurately representing a historical figure a complex and difficult task.

Furthermore, Herstorical documentation of women's lives is often insufficient and incomplete; the documentation of human history is biased, as Frans Schouten notes: 'history has always been written by the winners and not by the losers, and winning in itself does not prove historical truth'.<sup>xxv</sup> Dominant (male) groups have created the historical narratives that form contemporary heritage.<sup>xxvi</sup> One strategy used to integrate authenticity was to include verbatim monologues. In scene 1 of the play, a performer took on the character of Mrs Archibald Colquhoun, delivering the same speech that she delivered at an Ayrshire anti-suffrage meeting in 1913. It should be noted, however, that this performance was an interpretation of Colquhoun's words, and that while verbatim text can lend authenticity to Herstorical performance in heritage sites, it cannot be offered as a complete and accurate representation of the past.<sup>xxvii</sup> It must, therefore, be combined with other aspects of the site such as local myths, in order to begin to create a spatially engaged representation of under-represented narratives.

Although there were moments in the script where the performers spoke exactly the words of the person they were portraying, for the most part sections from newspaper clippings were incorporated into the words of the characters. Such insertions were necessary in many places throughout the script, given the scarcity of documented testimony. Frances Parker's final speech, for example, was crafted around a 1914 article about her court appearance. The included verbatim phrases are in bold:

FRANCES:

As to the question of Robert Burns, you should know that we do not wish to attack the man and his works – in fact many of his writings resonate with our cause. **Burns once wrote of Robert the Bruce and the Scottish struggles for independence, “Liberty's in every blow, let us do or die”.** And that is exactly what we believe – we will strike blow upon blow until our cause is won, and we are happy to die for our beliefs. **You, all of you proud Scotsmen, you used to be so proud of your heroes like the Bruce, and now you have taken to torturing women.** I wonder what your

heroes would say, those who fought so fiercely against oppression, to see you now oppressing the women of your country. No, we do not attack Robert Burns, but we attack the symbol of patriarchal power that you have bastardised him as – and that’s why we attack his cottage.

The creative license taken here offered the audience the means to question the performance site. Rather than accept the RBBM at face value, this speech encouraged the audience to view the site as part of a larger problem of androcentrism in heritage, and acknowledge that it should not be accepted as ‘politically or culturally neutral’.<sup>xxviii</sup> As in the work of Phil Smith, I wanted to create a version of Frances Parker that encouraged the audience to interrogate the site, specifically in terms of gender relations, by explicitly linking the cottage to patriarchal power structures.<sup>xxix</sup>

During the development and rehearsal period of *CauseWay* the potential spaces of interaction and connectivity between site, performer and audience showed in unplanned and fortuitous ways. The opening scene, for example, was placed in a rounded seating area at the back of the museum. During rehearsals, the performers began to play with the varying levels of the bench and the grass behind it, weaving in and out of the audience area so as to include them in the performative interactions occurring between the characters. In this scene, this bench started as a waiting area. Then it became a space for protest and then for oppression, as the following excerpt from my journal illustrates

They set up a playful, friendly relationship before becoming galvanised by the classic suffragette chant 'votes for women!' At this point they begin to move in and out from behind the audience, including us in their chants, before turning on each other. Broughton takes on the role of antagonist, telling Reid to 'go home and mind the baby', and the performers shift once again to become attendees of a 1913 anti-suffrage meeting.

While this space had not originally played any role in Parker and Moorhead’s journey to Alloway, in this moment it became the beginning of the story. Furthermore, its identity continually shifted and alluded to the ‘inherently dynamic’ nature of the space.<sup>xxx</sup> In layering the characters and the

performers on to the site, we found the potential for the space to take on multiple identities within the world of the play, and for the trajectory of the characters to be shaped by its physical layout. This is one of the key aspects of the flexible characterisation model: the performers' identities can be overlaid with aspects of the site and their characters, but must still be present within the performance. This can be achieved by shifting between socio-temporal identities as in *CauseWay* or by selecting which aspects of the self and the character to perform, as *In Hidden Spaces*.

In developing the relationship between the performers, characters and site, I turned to the mythogeographical framework of the study.<sup>xxxii</sup> The journey of the characters, and the performance-based discoveries that could be made within the site were prioritized over any notions of accuracy or fact. While the process of creating the performance drew from the concepts posited in mythogeography, Phil Smith does advocate a more open, ambiguous engagement with a site.<sup>xxxiii</sup> He proffers the 'actor-as-signpost' model, which rejects character and 'psychological acting', in favour of the performer gesturing outwards towards the site in order to highlight its heterogeneous narratives.

While there were moments in *CauseWay* where the performers signalled out towards the space, it cannot be denied that the piece was rooted in psychological drama. This decision was made primarily due to the suffragette story being an obvious narrative to explore in my work at the RBBM. Furthermore, as posited by Jacques Rancière, the energy inherent in the 'theatrical spectacle', regardless of its form, can be offered to the audience and allow them to be active participants in the co-creation of the experience.<sup>xxxiii</sup> Therefore, the use of character can be viewed as an agent in this transfer of energy and can use internal conflict as a springboard to activate the audience's understanding of the women represented and the reconfiguration of the space.

The purpose of the performance was to celebrate the unrepresented figures of Parker and Moorhead within the site by eschewing the hegemonic Burns narrative, but this required room for speculation. Herstorically accurate performance in heritage sites is almost impossible. At best,

heritage sites underrepresent women's narratives and at worst they exclude them entirely.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

Therefore, the 'multiplicity of meanings' present within the site was allowed to trickle into the performance text: a semi-circular bench transformed the work and was transformed by it; a quiet pathway became a 40-mile journey (Figure 3); a small room within a cottage existed simultaneously in 1914 and 2015. Combining the exploratory nature of mythogeography with the transformative possibilities of the socio-spatial dialectic gave the performers license to reconfigure understandings of the site, while giving rein to Parker and Moorhead's story. Instead of limiting the performance, lack of evidence of these women's lives enabled it to engage and interact with the site in a manner that may not have been suitable for a play concerned only with historical accuracy.

In the various responses given by the *CauseWay* audience, the concept of historical accuracy was not mentioned particularly frequently. Yet discussions of accuracy and authenticity took place throughout the performance process. They aligned with data gathered by the Performance, Learning and Heritage (PLH) project which, conducted at Manchester University from 2005-2008, was the first longitudinal study of heritage and performance in the UK, and remains the most substantial to date.<sup>xxxv</sup> In one of several publications of this project, Kidd notes that a perceived lack of 'authenticity' in heritage performance' could also become a distraction, one instance of perceived inauthenticity becoming a primary focus (indeed an irritant) and thus an insurmountable hurdle in the meaning-making process'.<sup>xxxvi</sup> Although Kidd does not seek to explicitly define the term, she refers to 'continuing analogies between authenticity and some sense of 'reality' or 'truth''.<sup>xxxvii</sup> This highlights the apparent necessity, at least from an audience perspective, of rooting performance within historical accuracy, which begged the question of how to balance scarce documentation, creativity and accuracy.

The *CauseWay* audience did not focus specifically on authenticity, although one survey respondent in particular found certain perceived historical inaccuracies particularly problematic. In the section where respondents were invited to provide any additional comments, one stated:

Fannie Parker's name as it appears in archival material should be used, some historical inaccuracies e.g Burns did not build the cottage (he left as a child), Fannie was New Zealand born and Oxbridge educated, Her citing of Burns and nationalism would have rankled at the time. (...) Don't forget that the women (matrons) involved in force feeding were culpable. Remember most Scottish GPs refused to force feed, hence the butcher at Perth prison.

(Participant SM1)

Of particular interest here is that two of the 'mistakes' highlighted were never mentioned in the performance: it was never stated that Burns built the cottage, and the gender of those involved in force feeding was never mentioned. I inferred from this response that the feminist nature of the work led the participant to believe that men were being blamed for Parker's suffering instead of institutionalized misogyny, which existed regardless of gender, as was evident in Mrs Colquhoun's speech. Although this participant stated that they enjoyed the play, noting these errors seemed to be of great importance and clearly had an impact upon their reading of the performance. It should be acknowledged, then, that, for some audience members, a baseline of accuracy is desirable when creating characters.

While noting that this comment came from only one of 25 participants, the strong objection to ostensibly incorrect information must be considered. Bohlin et al argue that the conceptualization of heritage as 'negotiated and unstable' has gained traction in heritage studies.<sup>xxxviii</sup> In this instance, however, the participant in question viewed this performance as a concrete representation of truth. The pretence within which traditional plays operate may not be as readily accepted within the heritage site. Such spaces are 'cast as a receptacle[s] of history, indexical to time rather than part of it', and as such the information offered there, whether by plaque, tour guide or performer, is received as a true and accurate representation of the past.<sup>xxxix</sup>

It seems that some importance must be placed on historical accuracy in order for audiences, or at least for some members, to invest in the heritage performance text and engage with its thematic content. The tension that arises, then, is between the need for authenticity and the artistic

freedom to allow the space to tell the story. In the development and performances of *CauseWay*, Herstorical figures, verbatim text and the identities of the performers themselves were all layered upon the site in order to develop characters that were relevant yet representative. In order to consolidate the methods used in *CauseWay*, the interplay between character, site and performer was placed at the centre of the research focus in the following project *In Hidden Spaces*.

### **In Hidden Spaces: The Untold Stories of the Women of Rozelle House**

When *In Hidden Spaces* began at Rozelle House there did not appear to be one specific Herstorical story to tell, so the process used principles from Smith's mythogeography and explored discourses surrounding feminist theatre practice, particularly those relating to gender and hierarchy. This combination allowed for an exploration of space, myth and Herstory that was rooted in feminist principles. Six performers developed this performance and we functioned as an artistic collective, eschewing hierarchical structures as far as possible. The process combined performance experiments with the documented history of the house in order to explore the Herstory of the site. Our explorations and performance experiments resulted in four public performances at Rozelle on the 23 and 24 July 2016. The collaborative devising process was based entirely at Rozelle House, lasting from the 11 to 22 July 2016. The performers involved were Teri Beveridge, Annaliese Broughton (who performed in *CauseWay*), Poppy Lironi, Kirsty Mackenzie, Rebecca Wilkie and myself.

It is important to note that the development and final performance of *In Hidden Spaces* existed within specific parameters. My work in the site aimed to explore Herstory in relation to site, and made use of feminist principles in order to do so. It is for this reason that a semblance of character was deemed necessary; we wanted to represent these women and chose what we felt was

the most appropriate form. Artistic work that involves a prolonged period spent in a site cannot be understood as a neutral process:

To think art-site relations through residency is to navigate key tensions that sit at the heart of these questions, namely the need to negotiate a tightrope between an over-valorisation of immersion and engagement as inherently good, as set against programmatic forms of production, wherein the artist's a priori assumptions and projects are imposed upon a site.<sup>xi</sup>

Although Hawkins specifically refers to artistic residencies, the issues she notes here were present in our work at Rozelle. The tension between what we knew and what we wanted to project onto the site, and what we found when we worked there, proved difficult during the creation process. We carried a constant awareness of the brief of the project – a feminist interpretation of the site – which inhibited our process at times. We felt the pressure, real or perceived, to include Herstorical facts and figures that had informed our experience. Indeed, applying feminist principles of performance making to the site without necessarily exploring Herstorical information is quite another (and entirely worthwhile) area for investigation. It should be acknowledged that the project existed within the limits of the study, and that the methods discussed here are particularly pertinent to those who create site-specific Herstorical performance rather than to those who wish to develop a feminist reading of a site.

The purpose of *CauseWay* as a live performance was to represent a very specific story. Notable events had happened and in developing the performance I aimed to challenge the dominant biographical narrative of the site (the life of Burns) by overlaying it with another (the journey of Parker and Moorhead). When we began exploring Rozelle, however, there was not one, specific Herstorical story that offered itself as the sole basis for a performance.<sup>xli</sup> The beginning of our process involved each of the artists looking over photocopies of censuses and notes I had written about the women of the Hamilton family to whom the house belonged.

In addition, some of the artists carried out their own research and brought new stories and Herstorical figures to the process, most notably Broughton's discovery of the story of Susanne Schaeffer (Figure 4), a Jewish evacuee from Berlin, who was brought to Rozelle House on Kindertransport in 1939. This Herstorical information formed the basis from which we explored the site and the narratives within it; the diverging narratives led us to create six one-to-one performances scattered around the house. In our early work, we used exercises that invoked the women of the house in order to see what the arc of this performance might be. One notable example of this occurred early in the first week, when each performer was asked to move around the house as one of the women who had lived there. However, I noted in my rehearsal journal that 'characters seem less relevant. We are aware that first-person interpretation just isn't the right form for this piece; we want to invoke the ideologies of the space rather than create a drama on top of them. We want the audience to be free to create their own narrative'.

We anticipated that dressing in period costume and using antiquated language might present a barrier between audience and performer; the two could not exist in the same moment as we would also be playing characters from the past. Indeed, Smith argues that character should be eschewed entirely in favour of the actor-as-signpost, in which the performer uses presence to highlight salient components of the site, while still leaving room for audience interpretation.<sup>xlii</sup> The challenge presented to us, then, was to what extent we could represent the lives of these women and the issues inherent in their stories without pretending to *be* them.

Our struggles with characterization manifested itself in a variety of ways throughout the process. The Susanne Schaeffer story, for example, provided inspiration for much of Broughton's final performance. Reflecting on this during the focus group, Mackenzie noted:

I remember [Broughton] said halfway through and she was like 'yeah I was just off home last night and I was just researching Susanne and I actually realized that she's not a character, like she was an actual person that got, like taken here from Germany'. And



it just hit me, like these are actual people that people haven't respected enough to write about or use this house to tell their story.

That this story was real and that Schaeffer had lived in this house resonated deeply with Mackenzie. As discussed in the previous section on *CauseWay*, authenticity and accuracy are key in debates on heritage performance, and 'perceptions of authenticity remain crucial to individuals' meaning-making processes.'<sup>xliii</sup> As a collective, we felt that the form of one-to-one performance, with its inherent potential for moments of connection between performer and audience member, could be combined with Schaeffer's story in order to offer a performative interaction rooted in Herstorical authenticity. Maintaining continual awareness of the actor-as-signpost model, one of the first steps we took to fuse the mythogeographical framework with our found narratives was to position ourselves as audience members in the rehearsal process.

The first week of developing *In Hidden Spaces* generally took the form of creating short performances and sharing these with the group. One of Broughton's earliest pieces involved us interacting in different ways with the space she had chosen: moving across the floor, hiding objects and becoming statues. A discussion amongst the collective after this sharing suggested that taking an active role and having agency in the performance shifted how we interacted with the space. We were able to place ourselves within the narrative of the site, and this piece helped us to challenge the 'normal' manner of inhabiting a heritage site. Phil Smith has noted that offering the audience agency 'facilitated a certain self-mythologization of the audience members that enabled them to transfer the disruptive qualities of the tour and its space to the disruption of themselves'.<sup>xliv</sup>

Rather than observe a drama unfold, we were offered the opportunity to become active participants in the world that Broughton was creating and, in this way, to reimagine how we could interact with the site as a whole. In developing this piece, we started to bring elements of Schaeffer's life at Rozelle into the performance, while still maintaining the active agency of the audience. We decided to invite rather than force the audience into Broughton's game in order that

they felt open and comfortable within the challenge presented to them.<sup>xlv</sup> By the end of the process, Broughton had us hiding Russian dolls and teaching her how to sew thus reclaiming the site as a space of play while still retaining the authenticity of Schaeffer's experience.

Our work at Rozelle, as for *CauseWay*, departed at key points from the actor-as-signpost model in order to work towards developing an alternative model for performing site-based heritage. While we did use our presence to gesture outwards towards the site and reveal potential trajectories within the space, we also used character to varying degrees through the performance. Smith argues that privileging the performer over the site is reductive and 'diminishes (...) connections' that might be experienced between the performer, site and audience.<sup>xlvi</sup> While inserting psychological drama into a site can make the site simply a backdrop, in the case of creating Herstorical site-specific performance, the performer's identity and that of the women represented must be privileged over the site itself. The dominant discourse of men's experience in heritage sites represses Herstorical narratives: attention must be drawn, then, to the feminist stance of the performers and the gender of those represented when creating such works.<sup>xlvii</sup> Furthermore, as noted before, the use of character can be understood as an effective component in catalyzing the imagination of the audience, offering the audience renewed understandings of space.

### **Flexible characterization**

During *In Hidden Spaces*, the ease that we developed in relating to each other within the collective was projected on to our relationship with the space itself. Lironi noted in the focus group discussion:

I think towards the end of the first week, for me, was when we'd get out of the car and look up at the house every morning and just be like 'back at the office'. But the best job because you know that you're gonna go in, go to the toilet, get a cup of tea, chat for half an hour and then get to work and it was that kind of, like, brilliant routine.

Lironi's words mark our clear correlation between spending leisure time as a group (chatting and drinking tea) and feeling a sense of ownership of the space ('back at the office'). It was incumbent upon us as performers, then, to recreate something of this sense of connection to audiences. One of the most problematic aspects of playing characters in *In Hidden Spaces* was our feeling that it could inhibit connection between performer and audience since the piece roots the work in pretence. For example, we would be required to feign ignorance of twenty-first century life rather than base our interaction in present-day reality. We enacted the concept of the socio-spatial dialectic to create a relationship between performer, character and the space, and we achieved this by creating new associations and new connections within the site and highlighting its status as a relational entity.<sup>xlvi</sup> Offering this performer/audience connection provided a simulacrum of our experience in the site, and offered the audience a degree of that ownership which we felt in the space.

We adapted the concept of 'transparent performance' which is 'analogous to a domestic slideshow, where photographic images are projected onto the most convenient wall, revealing both the images and the cracks in the surface onto which they are projected'.<sup>xli</sup> Rather than understanding ourselves as being projected onto the site, the Herstorical figures were projected onto ourselves. Our performing bodies, overlaid with the identities of Herstorical figures, worked in tandem with the site to represent the lives lived within it. This is a key facet of the flexible characterisation model, since it involves the characteristics of a Herstorical figure (or figures) combined with the identity of a performer. These identities are then performed flexibly during an interaction with an audience; the performer offers moments of their own experiences alongside those of their 'character'.

Building on this model, which had emerged during *CauseWay*, flexible characterization was developed through a process of experimentation and exchange during *In Hidden Spaces*. Once we

had focused on specific individuals from Rozelle's past, each shifted between the roles of performer and audience in rehearsal. We discussed the commonalities we had with the characters and included these in our performances. Similarly to Phil Smith's work, where 'performers leave a trace' upon the site, Herstorical women here left a trace upon us.<sup>1</sup> We experimented with the levels of information to divulge, which sections of the performances would be informed by ourselves, and which by the Herstorical character. As a result, some performances were rooted more in Herstorical fact than others.

Broughton's piece, for example, included less information from her real life: we had agreed that the story of Susanne Schaeffer felt more connected to contemporary society (possibly due to its chronological proximity, having occurred in the twentieth rather than the eighteenth century). Wilkie, however, performed a piece inspired by Lady Jane Hamilton (1704-1753). It involved a guessing game in which she primarily revealed facts about her own life (Figure 5). The ratio of self to character was not always a conscious decision, but an evolution of the pieces brought about by interaction and responses from the others in the collective. In some instances the character's lives took priority in order to illuminate certain narratives; in others we drew more upon the performers' experiences. In the public performance of *In Hidden Spaces*, each performer presented a hybrid character, informed to greater or lesser degrees by their own lives and the lives of the women they had researched.

During the first week of *In Hidden Spaces*, when tension between the character and the performer troubled the process, I suggested that we consider the women whom we were inspired by as images drawn on acetate sheets and projected onto ourselves. Wilkie stated in the focus group that she found this concept particularly useful:

My whole thing was having a genuine connection with someone, even a stranger, in a short space of time and just being open and taking that time to be open and connect with someone. So I couldn't have done that if I wasn't being elements of me and being a real person, because people just wouldn't have connected with that.

By adopting this model, we could represent the stories of the women of Rozelle without the need for acting, and therefore we would not need to feel limited by their experiences. In imbuing the work with both Herstorical and personal ideologies, flexible characterization allowed us to represent the space as ‘a particular moment in those networks of social relations and understandings’.<sup>li</sup> The ‘cracks’ of our individual personalities could be shown in order to offer the audience a truthful experience of the connection we (the performers) had developed with the space and with one another.

The interaction with characterization and the identity of the performer fluctuated throughout my work at RBBM and Rozelle House, and ‘flexible characterization’ came as a method through which heritage performers can meaningfully interact with their designated space. Flexible characterization can be understood as developing from the actor-as-signpost model, while also taking into account arguments surrounding authenticity and audience participation in heritage sites. All things considered, as delineated above, I propose that those creating feminist heritage performance develop and embody flexible characters. This model has the potential to respond to the specificities of the heritage site by incorporating verbatim text, Herstorical research, myth and spatial relationships. Indeed, the model itself can be of use to varying extents, and should be understood as a set of guiding principles rather than rigid rules for creating such work.

## Notes and References

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- <sup>i</sup> Phil Smith, 'Actors as Signposts: A model for site-based and ambulatory performances', *New Theatre Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (May 2009), p. 159-71.
- <sup>ii</sup> Cristina Delgado-García, *Rethinking Character in Contemporary British Theatre: Aesthetics, Politics, Subjectivity* (Boston: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, 2015).
- <sup>iii</sup> Victoria Bianchi, 'Bring me a Souvenir: performing Herstory on Ayr beach', *Studies in Theatre and Performance* (2020), p.1–21. The partnership was funded by Creative Scotland, and supported a range of artistic activity in South Ayrshire.
- <sup>iv</sup> *CauseWay* was a walking performance, which began at the Robert Burns Birthplace Museum and moved through the village of Alloway before finishing at Burns' Cottage, where the poet was born. *In Hidden Spaces* was performed in and around the ground of Rozelle House.
- <sup>v</sup> Anon, 'Votes for Women, Gunpowder for Burns', *Glasgow Herald*, 9 July 1914, available at <<http://digital.nls.uk/scotlandspages/timeline/1914.html>> [Accessed 1 May 2020]
- <sup>vi</sup> Laurajane Smith, 'Heritage, gender, identity' in Brian J. Graham and Peter Howard, eds., *The Ashgate Research Companion to Heritage and Identity*. (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2008), p. 165.
- <sup>vii</sup> Smith, 'Actors as Signposts', p.161.
- <sup>viii</sup> Robin Morgan, *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement* (New York: Vintage, 1970).
- <sup>ix</sup> Casey Miller and Kate Swift, *Words and Women: New Language in New Times* (New York: Anchor, 1976), p.135.
- <sup>x</sup> Jenny Kidd, 'Performing the knowing archive: heritage performance and authenticity' *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, Vol.17, No. 1 (2011), p. 22–35.
- <sup>xi</sup> Smith, 'Actors as Signposts', p.161.
- <sup>xii</sup> See Laurajane Smith 'Heritage, Gender, Identity'; Anthony Jackson and Jenny Kidd, eds., *Performing heritage: Research, practice and innovation in museum theatre and live interpretation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011). This project explored performance in heritage sites and remains the most substantial study in this area to date.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Phil Smith, *Mythogeography: A Guide to Walking Sideways* (Axminster: Triarchy, 2010).
- <sup>xiv</sup> Brad Haseman, 'Rupture and recognition: identifying the performance research paradigm' in Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt, eds., *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry*. (London: I.B. Tauris & Co.Ltd., 2007)., pp.147-158
- <sup>xv</sup> Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt, *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry*, p.1.
- <sup>xvi</sup> John Freeman, *Blood, Sweat & Theory: Research Through Practice in Performance*. (Oxford: Libri Publishing., 2010), p.x.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Smith, *Mythogeography*, pp. 38-39
- <sup>xviii</sup> Mike Pearson, *Site-Specific Performance* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 19.
- <sup>xix</sup> Edward W. Soja, 'The Socio-Spatial Dialectic', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 70, No. 2 (1980), p. 207–25. This dialectic can broadly be understood as conceptualizing the relationship between people and space as multi-directional and multi-faceted; we form and are formed by the spaces that we interact with.
- <sup>xx</sup> Matt Rogers, 'Contextualizing Theories and Practices of Bricolage Research', *The Qualitative Report*, Vol.17, No. 48 (2012), p.1.
- <sup>xxi</sup> Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, 'Using thematic analysis in psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2006), p. 77–101.
- <sup>xxii</sup> All performers have given permission for their names to be used.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Jacqueline Tivers, 'Performing heritage: the use of live 'actors' in heritage presentations', *Leisure Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 3–4 (2002), p.187–200.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Kidd, 'Performing the Knowing Archive', p.23.
- <sup>xxv</sup> Frans F.J. Schouten, 'Heritage as Historical Reality' in David T. Herbert, ed., *Heritage, Tourism and Society* (London: Mansell, 1995), p. 24.

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- <sup>xxvi</sup> Cara C. ‘Monumentally male? A guided tour of the heritage tourism industry’, *Trouble and Strife: A Radical Feminist Journal*, Issue 34 (Winter 1996/7), pp.53-61.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Janet Gibson, ‘Saying it Right: Creating Ethical Verbatim Theatre’, *NEO: Journal for Higher Degree Research Students in the Social Sciences and Humanities*, Vol. 4 (2011), p.1–18.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Laurajane Smith, p.161.
- <sup>xxix</sup> Phil Smith, ‘Turning Tourists into Performers: Revaluing agency, action and space in sites of heritage tourism’, *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (2013), p.102–113.
- <sup>xxx</sup> Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), p.3.
- <sup>xxxi</sup> Smith, *Mythogeography*, p.
- <sup>xxxii</sup> Smith, ‘Turning Tourists’, p.
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 2011), p.2 –3.
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> Aitchison, ‘Monumentally Male?’, p.53.
- <sup>xxxv</sup> Jackson and Kidd, eds., *Performing Heritage*.
- <sup>xxxvi</sup> Kidd, ‘Performing the Knowing Archive’, p.26.
- <sup>xxxvii</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.
- <sup>xxxviii</sup> Anna Bohlin, Ingrid Martins Holmberg, Katarina Saltzman and Annelie Sjölander-Lindqvist, ‘Dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in heritage: reflections from a Ph.D. course’, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 6 (2012), p. 654.
- <sup>xxxix</sup> Ella Parry-Davies, ‘Storied Space: Epistemology and Place in the Performance Museum’, *Platform: Journal of Theatre and Performing Arts*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (Spring 2014), p.15.
- <sup>xl</sup> Harriet Hawkins, *For Creative Geographies: Geography, Visual Arts and the Making of Worlds*. (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 155
- <sup>xli</sup> Jean Aitchison, *The Women of Rozelle (prior to 1860)* (unpublished, 1994).
- <sup>xlii</sup> Phil Smith, ‘Actors as Signposts’, p. 164
- <sup>xliii</sup> Kidd, ‘Performing the Knowing Archive’ p. 31–32.
- <sup>xliv</sup> Phil Smith, ‘Turning Tourists into Performers’, p.107.
- <sup>xl</sup> See Anthony Jackson, ‘Engaging the audience: negotiating performance in the museum’ in Anthony Jackson and Jenny Kidd, eds., p.11–25.
- <sup>xlvi</sup> See Phil Smith, ‘Actors as Signposts’, p.164.
- <sup>xlvi</sup> Laurajane Smith, p.159
- <sup>xlvi</sup> Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, pp. 7-8
- <sup>xlvi</sup> Phil Smith, ‘Actors as Signposts’, p. 162.
- <sup>l</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>li</sup> Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, p.5.